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AUTHOR Cooper, Richard Magill
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ABSTRACT

The study attempts to survey and record the opinions of high school seniors on the vocational and consumer aspects of their formal education. Following a brief overview of the literature related to current vocational and consumer education programs is a description of the survey instrument and the study sample--two San Diego (California) County high schools representing upper-middle and lower-middle income communities. The survey instrument is included in the document and the resulting data analyzed and tabulated. The study concludes that substantial instruction is needed in the area of consumer education and more adequate counseling must be effected in assisting the student to make the college preparatory/vocational decision. Coordination of the consumer curriculum is needed. Finally, it is determined that a coordinated, vertical career education program embracing all grade levels would reduce the incidence of misplaced education of the community's youth in preparation for their assumption of productive roles in the community. (Author/MW)

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# THE EVALUATION OF VOCATIONAL AND CONSUMER EDUCATION BY GRADUATING HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS

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Richard Magill Cooper

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## Introduction

It would seem a valid presumption that public secondary schools are financed by the community in order to develop certain skills in the young which enable them to assume productive roles in the community. The skills necessary to fulfill these roles include: adequate preparation to gain employment directly after graduation, information intended to be supplemented by instruction of a more technical nature at a trade school or community college, or the basic academic information and discipline necessary to earn the degree(s) that would make the individual of greater value to the community.

Questions have been raised by members of the community concerning the adequacy of the instruction which is intended to enable the high school graduate to seek and gain employment without additional training. If employment can be obtained, it is questionable if the graduate is properly equipped to distribute that income in an efficient manner to the vendors of those goods and services that the young person or couple needs or desires.

Those probably best qualified to judge the adequacy of the high school training are those with the most acute need for vocational and consumer information--graduating high school seniors. The present study is an attempt to survey and record the opinion of high school seniors on the vocational and consumer aspects of their formal education.

Statement of the Problem

Briefly stated, the problem is: Do graduating high school seniors judge the vocational and consumer education received to be adequate?

Review of the Literature

A brief overview of published thought may provide insight into current programs being ovvered in Vocational and Consumer Education.

Career Education is a concept first proposed by Venn in 1968 and expanded by Marland in 1971 which vertically involves the total public school--from elementary through high school--in developing a maximum variety of skills that would prepare the graduate by allowing him flexibility in a dynamic job market (Marland, 1973). These skills would fall in one of fourteen to eighteen "clusters" of jobs that people do. Generally, students in early grades would become familiar with job clusters, explore those clusters that interest them in the junior high years and develop skills in one cluster in senior high school. Oregon provides an example of a state committed to the concept of Career Education; it is the goal of the state Board of Education to enroll 70 percent of the junior and senior students in the state program by 1978 (State Plan for Vocational Education, 1973, p. 2).

Other exemplary vocational programs include the Skyline Center development of the Dallas (Texas) Independent

School District. This career high school houses 2,500 students in an eighty-acre plant. The center's unique facilities include a 30,000 square foot hangar for aeronautics students, a computer center, color TV studio, and a number of other features. The school acts as a center for Career Education for the Dallas district, with attendance on a full or part-time basis (Stamps, 1973).

Probably as a result of a lower level of federal funding, Consumer Education has generally not kept pace with the rapid gains made in Vocational Education in the past decade. Armstrong and Uhl (1971, p. 526) indicate that most schools treat Consumer Education as a secondary objective, complementing more traditional subjects. The subject principally taught in Home Economics departments, with Distributive Education, Business, Mathematics and Industrial Arts departments (in that order) also reporting to teach the subject as a part of their curricula. Teaching methods, with some exceptions, seem largely unchanged from the early years of the century.

Vocational and, to a lesser extent, Consumer Education have benefited from substantial federal funding in the past two decades. The Vocational Education Act of 1963 provided federal revenue for occupational education. Resulting from a mandated review in the fifth year of the program, Congress passed the Vocational Education Act Amendments (1968) which broadly expanded the scope, use and purpose of federal funds for career preparation and

consumer education. The act provided the following funds:

| | Total | Dedicated to Consumer Education |
|---|---|---|
| FY 1970 | $565 million | $25 million |
| FY 1971 | $675 million | $35 million |
| FY 1972 | $675 million | $50 million |

Methodology

In order to obtain a representative sample of high school seniors for the present study, it was decided to survey two schools in San Diego (California) County: one each from an upper-middle (N = 83) and a lower-middle income (N = 64) community. In an effort to reach both college-preparatory and vocationally-oriented students, eight courses were surveyed. A sample of those oriented to college-preparatory study (N = 91) was obtained from English 12 and Chemistry Study; vocationally-oriented inputs (N = 49; 7 were undeclared) were obtained from Clerical Training, Drama, Nursery School Aid, Key Punch, Applied Office Typing and Applied Data Processing classes. Existing computer programs (UCLA Biomedical Series BMD 04D and 08D) were used for frequency count and cross-tabulation purposes.

The instrument, reproduced in Figure 1, has five distinct sections. Following standard instructions, supplemented orally by the classroom teacher, the first section required seven responses representing student's evaluation of seven basic curriculum departments. The next eleven

STUDENT SURVEY ON VOCATIONAL AND CONSUMER EDUCATION

Please answer the following questions by placing an "X" in the appropriate place to indicate how much value the following courses were to you.

| How valuable (useful) do you think the following courses were in preparing you for adult life? | of great value | of some value | of slight value | of no value | no opinion | did not take course |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Business Courses | | | | | | |
| Industrial Arts (Shop) | | | | | | |
| Consumer Education | | | | | | |
| English | | | | | | |
| Home Economics | | | | | | |
| Mathematics | | | | | | |
| Music | | | | | | |
| **How valuable do you think your education was in preparing you to:** | | | | | | |
| 1. buy car insurance | | | | | | |
| 2. purchase food | | | | | | |
| 3. purchase clothing | | | | | | |
| 4. select life insurance | | | | | | |
| 5. select a savings program | | | | | | |
| 6. prepare your income tax | | | | | | |
| 7. use a checking account | | | | | | |
| 8. know the law regarding contracts and purchases | | | | | | |
| 9. purchase on credit | | | | | | |
| 10. buy or rent a home | | | | | | |
| 11. borrow money | | | | | | |
| **How useful was your high school training in preparing you to:** | | | | | | |
| 12. take a job interview | | | | | | |
| 13. fill out an employment application | | | | | | |
| 14. know what agencies can help you find a job | | | | | | |
| 15. know how trade unions operate | | | | | | |
| 16. see how companies (in my area of interest) actually operate | | | | | | |

| After graduation, do you intend to: | YES | NO | UNDECIDED |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. complete a four-year college program? | | | |
| 2. start your career now by getting a full-time job? | | | |
| 3. enter the military for at least two years? | | | |
| 4. enter a trade school (including business college) or a two-year community college on a full-time basis for vocational training? | | | |

Sex: ____ M ____ F

Emphasis: ____ College Prep ____ Vocational Ed.

Figure 1

queries attempted to record student opinion concerning a variety of consumer topics. Five responses were then elicited concerning non-technical vocational questions of a social nature. No attempt was made to obtain responses to technical questions, as a variety of occupational fields were being surveyed. Respondents to all questions in the above three sections could reply either in a five-point continuum or indicate that they "did not take (the) course." Four questions then attempted to determine which of four possible paths the respondent felt he would take after graduation: complete a four-year college program, get a full-time job, enter the military, or secure additional vocational training. An opportunity was then provided to indicate sex and program (college preparatory or vocational emphasis).

Results

Figure 2 presents a tabulation of responses to the survey. It is noted that a relatively large percentage of respondents indicated favorable attitude (of great/slight/some value) toward English (92% favorable) and to mathematics (93%), two of the more traditional and often debased courses. A large percentage (59%) of those responding indicated that they did not take a course specifically identified as 'Consumer Education." While the schools surveyed do not offer courses under the title "Consumer Education," the subject matter is professed to

STUDENT SURVEY ON VOCATIONAL AND CONSUMER EDUCATION

Please answer the following questions by placing an "X" in the appropriate place to indicate how much value the following courses were to you.

| How valuable (useful) do you think the following courses were in preparing you for adult life? | of great value | of some value | of slight value | of no value | no opinion | did not take course |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Business Courses | 54 | 22 | 7 | 2 | 9 | 53 |
| Industrial Arts (Shop) | 19 | 32 | 12 | 3 | 9 | 72 |
| Consumer Education | 16 | 18 | 9 | 3 | 14 | 87 |
| English | 41 | 58 | 34 | 8 | 2 | 4 |
| Home Economics | 29 | 42 | 21 | 7 | 6 | 42 |
| Mathematics | 54 | 62 | 18 | 6 | 3 | 4 |
| Music | 9 | 20 | 20 | 11 | 13 | 74 |
| **How valuable do you think your education was in preparing you to:** | | | | | | |
| 1. buy car insurance | 9 | 23 | 31 | 62 | 12 | 10 |
| 2. purchase food | 20 | 42 | 29 | 43 | 7 | 6 |
| 3. purchase clothing | 21 | 34 | 24 | 53 | 4 | 11 |
| 4. select life insurance | 7 | 18 | 26 | 72 | 13 | 11 |
| 5. select a savings program | 11 | 29 | 19 | 70 | 7 | 11 |
| 6. prepare your income tax | 14 | 22 | 23 | 63 | 8 | 17 |
| 7. use a checking account | 12 | 23 | 25 | 60 | 9 | 18 |
| 8. know the law regarding contracts and purchases | 17 | 19 | 23 | 60 | 12 | 16 |
| 9. purchase on credit | 14 | 14 | 26 | 65 | 12 | 16 |
| 10. buy or rent a home | 11 | 19 | 22 | 73 | 7 | 15 |
| 11. borrow money | 8 | 17 | 24 | 70 | 11 | 17 |
| **How useful was your high school training in preparing you to:** | | | | | | |
| 12. take a job interview | 45 | 34 | 33 | 29 | 1 | 5 |
| 13. fill out an employment application | 49 | 41 | 24 | 25 | 2 | 6 |
| 14. know what agencies can help you find a job | 24 | 32 | 32 | 48 | 5 | 6 |
| 15. know how trade unions operate | 3 | 21 | 60 | 69 | 9 | 15 |
| 16. see how companies (in my area of interest) actually operate | 13 | 19 | 31 | 67 | 7 | 10 |

| After graduation, do you intend to: | YES | NO | UNDECIDED |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. complete a four-year college program? | 58 | 47 | 42 |
| 2. start your career now by getting a full-time job? | 31 | 75 | 41 |
| 3. enter the military for at least two years? | 15 | 101 | 31 |
| 4. enter a trade school (including business college) or a two-year community college on a full-time basis for vocational training? | 31 | 66 | 50 |

Sex: 65 M
82 F

Emphasis: 91 College Prep
49 Vocational Ed.

Figure 2

be taught organically in subjects such as home economics, business, mathematics, industrial arts and others. It is noted that the district surveyed does offer a course with the above title as a one-semester elective for grades eleven through twelve at one other school.

Generally, a large number of negative ("of no value") responses were noted in the tabulation for the Consumer Education topics, identified as questions one through eleven on the survey. Nearly half (49.9%) of respondents considered training to select life insurance to be "of no value." This may be a function of students being unable to identify with courses specifically dealing with Consumer Education.

Responses to the vocationally-oriented questions (numbers 12-16) were slightly more favorable than consumer topics in earlier questions. A polarity of attitudes on vocational topics was noted: few students expressed no opinion.

The career-oriented questions indicated a significant number (21 to 34%) of graduating seniors undecided about post-graduation directions. The total number of affirmative responses (N = 135, 92%) to the post-graduation questions may provide falsely high indication; a number of respondents replied positively to more than one choice, as "yes" to a full-time job and to a college program.

Conclusions from Results

A number of inferences may be drawn from the data. The large number of respondents indicating that they "did not take (the) course" (N = 87) in reply to the question concerning Consumer Education implies a sex bias. Since the schools surveyed do not offer a course identified as Consumer Education, the majority of instruction in this important topic is presented in Home Economics and supplemented by units in various other departments. Hence, the reluctance of males to enroll in a traditionally female subject such as Home Economics may provide a degree of sex discrimination.

Concern should be expressed about the number of students in the college-preparatory program that have no intention of completing a four-year college curriculum. Chi-square ($X^2$) values are included in Tables 1-4 which cross-tabulate various questions against college-preparatory/vocational emphasis. Table 1 summarizes response to the question concerning completion of a four-year college program.

Figure 3 presents, graphically, the response to the "four-year college" question as a function of the community income level. Clearly, the upper-income group was wisely counseled into a college-preparatory program as 78% of the number enrolled in the program actually intend to earn a degree. It is noted that a minority (45%) of those in

Table 1

Do You Intend to Complete a Four-Year College Program?

| | College Preparatory | Vocational | Undeclared |
|---|---|---|---|
| Yes | 55 | 2 | 1 |
| No | 18 | 27 | 2 |
| Undecided | 18 | 20 | 4 |
| | | | ($X^2$ = 46.31) |

Table 2

Do You Intend to Start Your Career Now by Getting a Full-Time Job?

| | College Preparatory | Vocational | Undeclared |
|---|---|---|---|
| Yes | 10 | 20 | 1 |
| No | 59 | 12 | 4 |
| Undecided | 22 | 17 | 2 |
| | | | ($X^2$ = 25.08) |

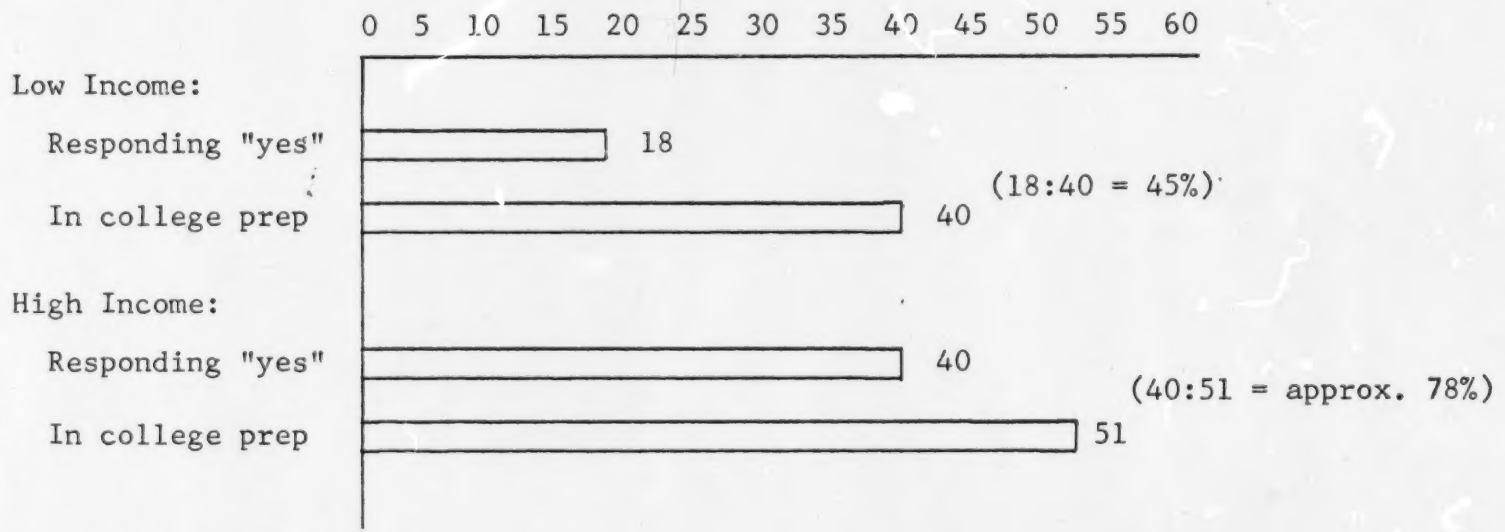


Figure 3

Do You Intend to Complete a Four-Year College Program?

college-preparatory study at the lower-income school actually intend to complete college. One might conclude that this misplacement of emphasis is a function of the pressure(s) of the family and/or community to achieve "something better."

Response relating to the question concerning obtaining a full-time job is presented in Table 2. The data in Table 2 reflect a large number of students that are undecided about entering the labor market. Significantly, 35% of college-preparatory students indicated that they were either undecided about, or committed to, entering the job market with little or no vocational training.

Table 3 presents the responses to the query concerning an intention to enter the military. A more affirmative response might have been anticipated, as the sample was drawn from a community with a large military population.

Finally, Table 4 tallies response to the question concerning the intention to obtain post-graduation vocational training. It is interesting to note that nearly 15.3% of college-preparatory students intend to seek vocational training after graduation.

Summary

It may be concluded from the foregoing that at least two needs are not adequately fulfilled. More

Table 3

Do You Intend to Enter the Military for at Least Two Years?

| | College Preparatory | Vocational | Undeclared |
|---|---|---|---|
| Yes | 9 | 5 | 1 |
| No | 63 | 34 | 4 |
| Undecided | 19 | 10 | 2 |
| | | | ($X^2 = 0.46$) |

Table 4

Do You Intend to Enter a Trade School or Community College for Vocational Training?

| | College Preparatory | Vocational | Undeclared |
|---|---|---|---|
| Yes | 14 | 15 | 2 |
| No | 47 | 17 | 2 |
| Undecided | 30 | 17 | 3 |
| | | | ($X^2 = 6.37$) |

substantial instruction is needed in the area of consumer education and more adequate counseling must be effected in assisting the student to make the college preparatory/ vocational decision.

Courses specifically identified as dealing with consumer education should be established in a department other than home economics (perhaps business) to encourage students of both sexes to receive instruction. Course offerings should be expanded to include home purchasing/ renting and maintenance, budgeting, the use and misuse of credit, and others. Most of these topics are taught currently in various departments, but coordination of the consumer curriculum seems to be lacking.

Students and parents will need additional encouragement to consider vocational programs in lieu of the traditional pre-college program for the student of average ability. Too many students appear to have chosen college preparatory tracks out of indecision about careers. It must be assumed that a coordinated, vertical career education program embracing all grade levels would reduce the incidence of misplaced education of the community's youth in preparation for their assumption of productive roles in the community.

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